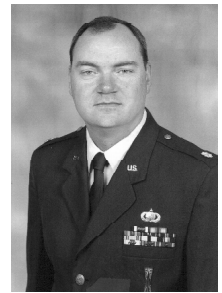


NOTES FROM THE:

Professional Military Comptroller School

by Lt Col Terry L. Ross



The Department of Defense (DoD) Professional Military Comptroller School (PMCS) plays a major role in making sure financial managers are ready to answer the bell when asked to step into the ring and advise senior defense leaders. The DoD is currently facing some major challenges—maintaining a balance between readiness, modernization, personnel, and infrastructure with very limited resources. The cost of getting it wrong is unacceptable. Financial managers, now more than at any time in the past, need to arm themselves with the skills and tools necessary to ensure Defense resources are used effectively and efficiently. Strong financial managers are key players in facilitating decision making by senior DoD leaders. Financial data must be accurate and financial systems need to produce the available data in a practical form that is useful to the decision maker. What does this have to do with PMCS? PMCS helps prepare the next generation of senior financial managers who will ultimately advise DoD leadership; Majors through Colonels (Captains by exception) and GS-12s through GM-15s (GS-11s by exception). The PMCS curriculum emphasizes a breadth of knowledge in financial management and leadership, economics and communication skills, along with an overview of fitness and wellness. Training is not the objective, but rather exposure and a broader perspective. In other words, PMCS graduates see the left hook coming and are prepared to act.

Like any good prize fighter, a financial manager must first know his or her way around the ring. A combination of outstanding guest speakers from the highest DoD echelons and the private sector, faculty instruction and seminar discussions with fellow students equip each student with the necessary sparring time. An experienced faculty provides a firm foundation with lectures and seminars on a myriad of subjects to include the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS); Activity Based Costing; Internal Controls; Economic Analyses; Budget Prioritization; and Comptrollership at various levels, just to name a few. With the footwork down, students advance to an impressive roster of guest speakers to learn how to deliver the knockout punch. Being afforded the opportunity to hear the latest lowdown from reigning champions on issues such as the CFO Act compliance, balanced budgets, expanding audit roles, and A-76 studies for Privatization

and Outsourcing, exposes students to the challenges facing the various DoD entities. PMCSs goal is not to train experts in the full spectrum of issues, but rather to expose financial managers to the big picture.

Speaking of the big picture, the whole environment in which financial managers operate is painted on the landscape of the Nation's economy. Many students are quite surprised to find a focus on economics at PMCS, and feedback at the completion of the course consistently identifies this subject area as a winner. Economics directly affect resources allocated to national defense, so Financial Managers need to understand nuances of the economy and their possible impact on budgets in the long term. PMCS will not make students into economists, but it will prepare them to discuss economic issues intelligently from an informed viewpoint. This leads logically to the next point—even a prize fighter needs to be able to communicate his or her viewpoint.

A big part of any pre-fight hype comes down to how well the respective boxers can intimidate their opponents. Financial managers may not be looking to intimidate anyone, but they have to be able to clearly and succinctly convey their messages. PMCS provides a balanced writing and speaking program geared toward improving individual communication skills. Instructors furnish one-on-one instruction so students can focus on particular areas they feel need improvement. Each student presents two briefings in his or her individual seminar and writes one 2-page and one 4 to 6-page research paper. An optional speaking lab is also provided for students who want to add additional eloquence to their speaking and briefing arsenal. Most anxieties are quickly overcome. This academic area is always listed as one of the top strengths of PMCS and is an excellent opportunity for personal growth in a non-threatening environment.

Like any good fight-training program, close attention must be paid to the mental and physical conditioning of the fighter. Since the goal of PMCS is a winning financial manager, a health and wellness program rounds out the regime. This program is designed to allow participation of everyone, no matter where they would place themselves on a fitness scale. The objective is to make students more aware of personal health,

along with the negative impacts of stress and a sedentary lifestyle, and the very positive effects of regular exercise and a balanced diet. The PMCS program was modeled after Dr Kenneth Cooper's approach to total health. Dr Cooper, the man who started America running, advocates aerobic exercise, emotional equilibrium, and a positive eating plan. PMCS brings in experts in each of these fundamental areas to present and discuss the latest topics in health and wellness. Prospective students need not be alarmed—PMCS is not a boot camp or a Physical Training (PT) program. The objective is for students to consider a healthier lifestyle and reap the benefits of a fuller and more productive personal and professional life.

The PMCS staff works hard to ensure each graduate is a bona fide contender headed toward many future, financial management successes. Historically, several graduates do go on to become heavy weight champions in their respective financial arenas. The primary objective of PMCS is to make sure students are prepared and

ready to advise senior defense leaders in making the tough decisions, and this can only be accomplished by looking at the whole person. Today's financial manager must have a firm grasp on current and future comptroller and leadership issues. Realizing these issues are set against a backdrop of competing national interests and driven by the economy enables financial managers to maintain their balance in the ring. Additionally, contenders must be able to clearly express their ideas. The best ideas will never see the light of day unless they are confidently conveyed to the decision maker. Finally, a strong contender must be physically and mentally alert and built for endurance. The PMCS total personal wellness program is designed to get individuals started on a healthier routine that will hopefully be continued after graduation. All financial managers should be actively building a roadmap toward professional growth. Plan on traveling through PMCS on your road to success.

